Sound And Fury

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The Dies Committee has graduated from playing with reputations and is now playing with American lives. In its zest to find new sustenance for its moribund Committee on Un-American Activities, it made an overnight investigation of the difficult and delicate work being carried on by the War Relocation Authority. And, with its customary discretion, it has promptly emitted a series of half-digested, sensational charges aimed at preventing the release from incarceration even of Japanese-Americans.

These charges, as WRA Director Dillon S. Myer testified on Tuesday, have had the effect of fostering "a public feeling of mistrust, suspicion and hatred." They may have even more dangerous consequences. For they give the enemy ammunition for his propaganda warfare against us. And, as Mr. Myer also pointed out, they "may lead to further maltreatment of our citizens who are prisoners or who are interned in Japan."

The Dies Committee has injected itself into a kind of inquiry which, if it is to be conducted at all, should be conducted with the utmost care and quietness. It is dealing with matters which have military implications and which involve the safety of American fighting men. The task is entirely outside the scope of the Dies Committee's authorization. Moreover, the whole record of this committee disqualifies it for an undertaking of this sort.

The War Relocation Authority has performed a distasteful piece of work conscientiously and with as much regard for our traditional civil liberties as the exigencies of war would permit. Its role is without precedent in the history of the United States. It has been forced to detain in places euphemistically termed "relocation centers" thousands of native-born American citizens for no reason save that they happened to be of Japanese ancestry. To the best of its ability, and in full collaboration with Naval Intelligence, Military Intelligence and the FBI, it has sought to release for useful work those of its wards whose loyalty to the United States could be satisfactorily established. That it has managed to reduce the numbers confined in its camps is altogether to its credit.

If Congress wishes to investigate this agency, it should appoint a select committee of properly qualified men to conduct the inquiry—with as little publicity as possible. And the starting point of any such investigation should be a concern for the constitutional rights of all American citizens, regardless of their color or ancestry.